

SDDirect Pride Blog Series

At SDDirect, Pride month has been an opportunity to reflect, learn and celebrate queer joy and progress made for LGBTQI+ rights globally, while deepening our understanding of the challenges that remain. Through this blog series, we continue our exploration of how LGBTQI+ communities are impacted by some of the global development challenges of today, and reflect on the barriers and opportunities for LGBTQI+ inclusion within our areas of work.

Violence against LGBTQI+ people – A hidden pandemic

Veronica Ahlenbäck

Navigating the threat of violence and discrimination is part of queer people's everyday reality – it is there when and where you choose to reach after someone's hand, in how you answer questions about your personal life, and in how you choose to express your identity in the world. For many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex people (LGBTQI+) people, making these choices are not even a possibility. Letting the people around you know who you are, expressing yourself in the way that you wish, and any acts expressing love and affection in public may come with too great of a risk of being targeted for violence and abuse to even consider. LGBTQI+ people know all too well that there is a hidden pandemic of violence based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) that must be acknowledged and addressed urgently.

Global evidence on violence against LGBTQI+ people

Unfortunately, unsafe spaces are found everywhere, and LGBTQI+ people are at risk of violence across all spheres of life – including in homes, at work, in public, in institutions, in humanitarian and conflict settings, and in cyberspace. A new report on [Ending Violence against LGBTQI+ People](https://ww2preventvawg.org/evidence-hub/lgbtq-report) (produced by Social Development Direct for FCDO's What Works to Prevent Violence programme) summarises existing global evidence on violence against LGBTQI+ people and identifies promising practices as well as emerging insights into what works to prevent this kind of violence.

Evidence shows, over and over again, that LGBTQI+ people face extremely high levels of violence. The report highlights evidence from different parts of the world that confirms alarming rates of violence based on SOGIESC in all regions of the world, affecting people across the LGBTQI+ spectrum. For example, recent studies have found that:

- Over half of sexual and gender minorities in Southern and Eastern Africa (56%) have experienced violence. (1)
- Nearly one third of lesbian women in Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa reported experiences of sexual violence. (2)
- 58% of LGBT people in the European Union, North Macedonia and Serbia experienced harassment in the five years preceding the survey – 11% of respondents were physically or sexually attacked because of being LGBTI in the five years preceding the survey. This figure rises to 17% for trans people, and 22% among intersex people. (3)
- 59% of trans and gender diverse people in the Caribbean experienced police violence, with people engaged in sex work at highest risk. (4)
- In Fiji, 83% of LBT women and non-binary people experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner. (5)
- In Canada, 59% of sexual minorities had experienced lifetime physical and/or sexual assault since age 15. This is much higher than the corresponding figure for heterosexual people (37%). (6)



Read the report here: <https://ww2preventvawg.org/evidence-hub/lgbtq-report>



The multiple and complex crises of today's world are having disproportionate effects on LGBTQI+ people and make it more urgent than ever to address this epidemic violence. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing inequalities, and some governments were seen to use increased state powers during lockdowns to crack down on LGBTQI+ communities. LGBTQI+ people face a high risk of violence in humanitarian crises as well as conflict and displacement settings, in which they are commonly excluded from access to services and humanitarian aid. Stories from [Syria](#), [Afghanistan](#) and [Ukraine](#) reveal the acute threats and risks that LGBTQI+ people face in conflict and when fleeing war.

The drivers and impacts of SOGIESC-based violence

There are many drivers of violence against LGBTQI+ people: harmful social and gender norms, criminalising and restrictive legislation, high levels of prejudice, negative attitudes and generalised hatred towards LGBTQI+ people - all underpinned by homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and interphobia. In research with trans women and men who have sex with men in Latin America and the Caribbean, most survivors of violence believed that the violence they had faced had been connected to challenging rigid views on what it means to be a 'man' or a 'woman'. (7)

Being queer in heteronormative, cisnormative and gender binary societies comes with a heightened awareness of the key drivers and risks of violence. LGBTQI+ people have to negotiate and manoeuvre carefully around these harsh realities, making continuous assessments of risk and protective factors to determine if they are in a safe space to be their fullest, most authentic selves.

We all carry multiple and overlapping identities that expose us to different vulnerabilities and privileges. While LGBTQI+ communities share experiences of violence, those who face intersecting inequalities are at heightened risk. Studies have found that LBQ women, trans people, non-binary people and intersex people face particularly high rates of violence. When this heightened risk of violence further intersects with inequalities and oppression based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, disability and health status, the outcomes are profoundly disturbing. (8) Research in the USA found that transgender people who are American Indian, Middle Eastern, and multiracial reported higher rates of violence. (9) In Canada, sexual minority people with disabilities were more likely to report that they had been physically assaulted (55%) and sexually assaulted (46%) since age 15 than those who did not have a disability. (10)

Violence against LGBTQI+ people has severe and long-lasting impacts on individuals - including physical health, mental health, sexual and reproductive health - and has a big negative impact on educational and economic opportunities. Almost all LBQ women in a study in Uganda had experienced mental health issues in their life. (11) This is often attributed to lifelong experiences of violence and related challenges, including childhood neglect and abuse, and intimate partner violence.

The ongoing fear and experiences of violence contribute to excessive stress in LGBTQI+ populations, so-called 'minority stress.' Minority stress is a unique form of stress originating from the culminative effects of discrimination faced by LGBTQI+ people, which has been linked to a range of negative physical and mental health outcomes.

The consequences of violence go beyond individuals, as it has ripple-effects on our communities:

"By definition, hate-motivated violence has an impact on the entire LGBTI community, sending a message that they are not accepted." (i)



What can be done to prevent violence against LGBTQI+ people?

LGBTQI+ people as a group face extremely high levels of violence, but this has received little attention, and extremely limited funding, from violence prevention efforts. Nonetheless, spearheaded by LGBTQI+ organisations, there are a growing number of interventions and initiatives aiming to combat violence against LGBTQI+ people. While building the evidence base on what works to prevent violence against LGBTQI+ people is still in at an early stage, there are emerging practice and insights to inform the direction for further investment, policy and programming. It is already clear that LGBTQI+ organisations hold the critical knowledge and experience to drive this work in collaboration with actors across multiple sectors in society. Promising interventions and approaches are appearing across a wide spectrum, such as school-based interventions; programmes with youth to challenge harmful norms; interventions targeting family members and intimate partners; and interventions working with faith-based leaders, health sectors actors, media actors, the police and law enforcement agencies.

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- Programmes with youth to challenge harmful norms;
- Interventions targeting family members and intimate partners;
- Interventions working with faith-based leaders, health sectors actors, media actors, the police and law enforcement agencies.

Based on the evidence review and consultations with LGBTQI+ organisations as well as LGBTQI+ rights and gender equality practitioners, the new [What Works report](#) on ending violence against LGBTQI+ people sets out recommendations in seven overarching areas:

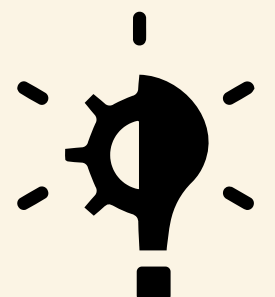
Policy-makers and donors

- 1) Increase funding in evidence-informed and evidence-generating prevention programming and evaluation
- 2) Integrate support for survivors within violence prevention programming
- 3) Support sustainability of LGBTQI+ organisations and movements



Practitioners

- 4) Build on emerging and innovative practice, and carefully adapt to different contexts
- 5) Innovate in areas where evidence is limited



Researchers

- 6) Support national and local LGBTQI+ organisations' research priorities and agendas, while contributing to building the global evidence base and filling evidence gaps
- 7) Follow ethical research approaches and data collection



Read the full [report](#) for the detailed recommendations, framed by guiding principles which any actors engaging in work to prevent violence against LGBTQI+ people should take on board, including the principles of do no harm, and ensuring meaningful engagement of LGBTQI+ organisations in all stages of work to address SOGIESC-based violence.



References

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- (8) For example, in Canada, 73% of sexual minorities who belong to an Indigenous group had been physically assaulted, and 65% had been sexually assaulted. Additionally, sexual minority people with disabilities were more likely to report that they had been physically assaulted (55%) and sexually assaulted (46%) since age 15 than those who did not have a disability. See Jaffray, B. (2020) *Experiences of violent victimization and unwanted sexual behaviours among gay, lesbian, bisexual and other sexual minority people, and the transgender population, in Canada*, 2018, Statistics Canada, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/85-002-x/2020001/article/00009-eng.pdf?st=6KQASUDx>
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